Catholic Mission in the Belgian Congo

The Present Situation and Problems of the Catholic Missioners with a Brief Historical Survey

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LEOPOLD II
CONGO RIVER
WHITE FATHERS
WITCH DOCTORS
CONVERSION
EVOLVED NEGRO
LOVANIUM
ASSIMILATION
HIRED LABORERS

★

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1.

General Considerations

1. The Belgian Congo, Ruanda-Urundi included, has an area of 922,617 square miles. Although the total area of the Belgian Congo is 902,082 square miles, with a population of 10,500,000—11.6 persons per square mile, Ruanda-Urundi, with only 20,535 square miles, has a population of 3,560,000—173.3 persons per square mile. The total population of both is approximately 14,000,000. This immense territory, which is four times as large as Texas, is divided into 28 ecclesiastical divisions: 25 apostolic vicariates and 3 apostolic prefectures.

2. Here are some approximate figures about the condition of the Catholic Church in the Belgian Congo:

Principal Mission Stations (with resident missioners)	454
European missioner-priests	1,569
Native priests	243
European missioner-Brothers	575
Native Brothers	294
European missioner-Sisters	1,811
Native Sisters	456
Major seminaries (regional)	5
Seminarians (students in theology and philosophy)	372
Minor seminaries (classical studies)	24
Pupils in minor seminaries	1,651
Grade Schools	20,000
Pupils in grade schools	1,150,000
Normal schools	50
Students in normal schools	4,045
Vocational or trade schools	70
Students in vocational schools	4,500

Teachers (or monitors) in different schools 20,000
Catechists 25,000
Native Catholics 3,500,000
Catechumens 1,000,000

3. The Belgian Congo practically fills the basin of the Congo River and is a country of contrasts. Thus, one may not too lightly indulge in generalizations nor attribute general value to local impressions. There are wide contrasts in topography: tropical jungles, wooded plateaus, deforested prairies. There is a warm, humid climate in the equatorial region and along the rivers, and a temperate climate in the region of the Great Lakes and Katanga. Some of the tribes are disappearing and have a birth rate of only 10 per thousand; others possess a striking vitality with a birth rate as high as 30 and 40 per thousand.

2.

Historical Survey of Evangelization in the Belgian Congo

4. The Good Tidings did not really penetrate into Central Africa until the 19th century. There had been a first attempt to bring the Faith to Central Africa by the Capuchins during the 16th century (one of the missioners being Joris Van Geel, a Belgian). But these heroic missioners disappeared and left no trace of their experiment in evangelization. In 1850 the Holy Ghost Fathers started mission work along the coast. About 1880 French missioners of the same Society founded mission stations in the Belgian Congo, one on the coast, at Nemloa, near Banana-Boanda; another at Boma, on the hill called Holy Ghost Hill.

5. The White Fathers of Cardinal Lavigerie penetrated from the East Coast of Africa into the Great Lakes' area in 1878, and into the Belgian Congo in Tanganiyka territory about 1880. Some of these priests even entered the Belgian Congo by way of the West Coast and founded a mission station at Kwamouth, in the area where the Kasai and Congo Rivers join.

6. King Leopold II, who had long planned to make the Congo a Belgian colony, wanted Belgian missioners for the evangelization of these regions. To secure this cooperation, he went personally to the Immaculate Heart of Mary Mission Society and in 1888 the first four missioners departed for the Belgian Congo. The White Fathers who were established at Kwamouth were asked to leave their mission, and their Superior, Father Dupont, later Apostolic Vicar of Nyassa, said: "The Kwamouth Mission demanded plenty of sacrifices, but the biggest of all was having to leave it." The French Holy Ghost Fathers also turned their mission stations of Nemlao and Boma over to the missioners of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

7. In 1890 the Congo possessed two ecclesiastical jurisdictions: the Apostolic Vicariate of Upper Congo, including the Great Lakes' region,

was entrusted to the White Fathers. They have at present five apostolic vicariates in that same territory: Tanganiyka, Kiku, Lake Albert, Ruanda and Urundi. The second division, comprising all the rest of the territory of the Belgian Congo, was called the Apostolic Vicariate of the Belgian Congo, and was entrusted to the Immaculate Heart of Mary Mission Society, which is still in charge of four vicariates there: Leopoldville, Kasai, Lisala and Boma.

8. Since that time, every Religious Order or congregation established in Belgium has sent missioners into areas of the Apostolic Vicariate of the Belgian Congo assigned to them by the Holy See. Here is a list of these societies, based on the year of their arrival: Jesuit Fathers, 1892; Trappists of Westmalle, 1894; Priests of the Sacred Heart, 1897; Norbertine Fathers, 1898; Redemptorists, 1899; Josephite Fathers of Mill Hill, 1906; Benedictines, 1910; Capuchins, 1910; Dominicans, 1911; Holy Ghost Fathers, 1911; Crosier Fathers, 1920; Franciscans, 1921; Missioners of the Sacred Heart, 1924; Lazarists, 1925; Augustine Fathers of the Assumption, 1925; Oblate Fathers, 1930; Passionists, 1930; Josephites (of Louvain), 1930; Montfortan Fathers, 1934; Sacred Heart Fathers (Picpus), 1935.

9. Most of the Religious Orders for women have sent members to the Belgian Congo. We will mention only those Orders which sent missionary Sisters before 1900: the Sisters of Charity of Ghent, the White Sisters of Cardinal Lavigerie, the Franciscan Missioners of Mary, Sisters of Notre Dame of Namur, Sisters of the Precious Blood, and Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Mary of Berlaer.

10. The Religious Orders of teaching Brothers represented in the Congo are these: the Brothers of Christian Schools, who have been in the Congo since 1910; the Marist Brothers, who arrived in 1912; and the Brothers of Our Lady of Lourdes (Oostakker), 1925. We may truly say that all of Catholic Belgium joined in the evangelization of the Congo.

3.

How the Congo Natives Were Converted to Catholicism

11. When the missioners were sent out from Rome in the early days of the Roman Conquest of Gaul, they worked under the protection of the Roman legionnaires. The Roman Conquest gave the missioners the opportunity to spread the Gospel to our ancestors, and it is a fact that wherever the "Pax Romana" was established, Catholic Church expansion followed.

12. A glance at the history of evangelization in the Belgian Congo obliges us to render to Caesar what is due to Caesar. The conquest of the Congo by Belgium opened the heart of the African continent to evangelization and the peace brought about by it among the tribes made it possible to preach the Gospel to them.

13. From a psychological point of view, we might consider the conversion of a white man who had lost the Faith or become indifferent, as a return to the God of his youth and the Faith of his fathers. But for a native, it means abjuration of the beliefs and superstitions handed down by his ancestors, and the acceptance of the moral law of the Ten Commandments. The first generation of natives who were converted, therefore, had greater difficulty in their conversion because they had to renounce ancestral beliefs.

14. With the African, superstition, fear and awe are living forces in the beliefs handed down to him by his ancestors and form a part of his social life. He is not an athiest. He believes in a Great Spirit who does not interfere with the doings of man. But at the same time he is a slave to the hundreds of good and bad spirits whom he has to please or escape from, and at no time may he offend the particular spirits of his ancestors. All kinds of fetishes, observances and tabus make the native run wild. Every unusual event in life compels him to consult a sorcerer who tells him how to appease the revengeful spirits.

15. The sorcerers, or so-called "witch doctors," are an evil power

every missioner has to cope with. Their authority flourishes on the ignorance of the people and education is one of the principal weapons in fighting them.

16. Yet in the Congo there are many souls who rather faithfully observed natural laws, and it would do injustice to the natives to think they were morally depraved. Those many souls of good will were the first to accept the Light of the true Faith.

17. Father Cambier said fifty years ago:

> Do you want to know why the natives were converted? There was a time when the terrible sleeping sickness came as a curse upon them. Guided by their instinct for self-preservation, they made away with their sick. But when they noticed that we, the white men, went in search of their sick and took them to our mission centers to be cared for by the Sisters; when they saw our priests die among them and be replaced by new arrivals; when they saw six of our Sisters die, one after another in their service, and saw others take their places around the sick beds, they concluded that charity thus shown was not different from the love for mankind we preached to them, and they were converted. We may say, therefore, that it was on account of the love for suffering mankind shown by the missioners that the natives became Catholics." *(Les Pionniers de la Civilization.)*

18. For these first converts the reason for their conversion to the Faith was the life of their missioners. The apologetics of the masses is the life of their priests. This is true in the Congo as well as in other countries.

19. The reason for the great number of converts to Christianity later on was also founded on supernatural motives, but it must be said that human motives helped to make conversions easier. Some simply accepted the religion of the invader along with all the other things. Many were converted in groups to the Faith—natives have always had highly developed community feelings, a social consciousness.

20. But whatever might have been the reason impelling them to conversion, we may affirm without any doubt that all converts developed an earnest conviction as a foundation for their Catholic belief. We may even say that the Catholic ways of thinking penetrated, not only the newly converted surroundings, but even the pagan society. Even there everybody knows that Catholicism does not impair the material interests of the tribes, and that the Reign of Christ is of no temporal nature. We may conclude, therefore, that the Faith of the converts has been purified and their perseverance in it is of a more free character, more personal and more supernatural.

4.

Method of Apostolate

21. The missioners sent by the Holy See took the Faith to Europe, but it was the work of the monks of the Western World that brought about the expansion of Christianity among the pagan tribes of our countries. In the field of education, the abbeys had a tremendous influence through organizing schools.

22. History is a perpetual repetition of cause and effect, an everlasting starting over again. That which happened once in our countries, has been repeated in the Belgian Congo. The missioners of the Congo must, like their colleagues of old, build-up a mission station where a group of missioners can reside in the newly-opened country. As every abbey was a new center of evengelization, so every new mission station is, today. As every abbey was a new center of education, so every mission station organizes a school at the start and provides education for the people.

23. The Faith was taken into the native villages by catechists trained in the mission schools. Most of these catechists were, and still are, married men. They range over a large territory, some residing as far as 150 miles from the central station. Their work in the village community is many-fold: they lead the people in prayers, take care of the catechumens and of the little Catholic community under their jurisdiction. Many of them are teachers who run the schools of the village. At the head of each group of catechists is a sort of dean, whose duty it is to visit the different communities and schools and give a complete report to the visiting priest.

24. It is the humble work of these groups that has brought about the conversion of the masses, and it is generally admitted that the most fervent Catholic communities in the Congo are those where a zealous catechist has initiated the people into Catholic life.

25. After this first instruction given to the catechumens in a class directed by a catechist, they are ready to receive further instruction in a mission station. There, an intensive preparation of several months pre-

pares them for the reception of Baptism and Holy Communion. After this the new converts return to their own village and form the nucleus of a new Christian community.

26. These new Christians must be visited frequently by the missioners. In most of the missions, made up as a rule by a great number of Christians, the missioner must exert himself to the utmost to cover his territory three or four times a year. These visits, however, are a bare minimum required to keep vivid the fervor of such Christian communities. During his mission tour the priest will stay from one to three days with the Christians, depending on the importance of their community. He will give them some instructions, administer the Sacraments, arrange marriages, repair broken homes, check the doctrine of the catechist and the manner in which the schools are run.

27. Tom Marvel, on page 273 of his book, *The New Congo,* pays a beautiful tribute to the missioners:

> The Catholic missionaries, and especially the teachers, in many of the missions, are of a high order of ability. I was impressed by their emphasis on practical training: manual arts and crafts, animal husbandry, gardening, weaving, and the like. These are taught, in many cases, by Lay Brothers who bring to their tasks a skill and understanding which seldom fail to inspire the native students. The bearded, white-robed Belgians are trained teachers rather than trained preachers, and the Congo needs more of the first than of the second.

28. In this way every mission center becomes, as did the abbey of old, a center of prayer, education and industry.

5.

Problems of a Modern Apostolate

The Hired Laborers

29. The method of evangelization described in the above section was used in the past and is still used where the natives stay in their home villages. During the first thirty years the missioners worked almost exclusively among the natives in their native places, living with them under the authority of their particular chieftains. Their occupation was principally agriculture.

30. But the economic evolution has now induced a great number of natives to leave their villages and immigrate into the big population centers. In 1935, 5 per cent of the natives lived outside of their tribal villages. By 1944 this number had increased to 14 per cent. Many social reasons urge the young people to abandon the country and settle in the city.

31. There are now around 680,000 hired workmen in the Congo, representing a real rush toward the city which the missioners have had to cope with. During the war it was impossible to add to the ranks of missioners, so that the movement toward the centers got partly out of spiritual control. Only the arrival of new missioners after the war made it possible to organize Catholic works in these new overcrowded areas.

32. It should be noted, however, that this new proletariat is not yet comparable to the proletariat we know in Western Europe and America. For the workingman of Europe and America there is no choice but work if he wants to live and provide a living for his family. The Congolese workingman is always able to quit proletarian life and return to his former status in the native village. It is, therefore, a free proletariat.

33. This social evolution, a sequel to the economic one, also bears on the religious problem. But just as in Europe and America it is useless to complain that rural life is being abandoned for city life, so it is useless to regret that the old social machinery is falling to pieces and that the rural areas are becoming more and more deserted. It is the

duty of the Church to adapt herself to the social conditions of the people.

34. The apostolate among the laborers of the great European and American enterprises is completely different from the apostolate among an aboriginal population. Wherever European industry has attracted a large number of hired laborers, the missioners must found new mission stations. The missioner has to visit the camps of these workingmen frequently and the ministry in these camps is very different from the one the missioner was accustomed to in the villages. Whereas, we formerly had to do with a rather stable population, now, in the labor camps, the missioners have to work among a constantly changing one. They have to trace down the baptized and check their religious and marriage situations. Moreover, while a missioner in a village can busy himself with the care of the Christian community during the whole day, in the camps his ministry is restricted to a few hours before and after work. One cannot separate the problem of hired labor from the social problem in the Congo. Whether she wants to or not, the Catholic Church in the Congo will have to adapt herself to the question of labor syndicates, which are still in an initial stage, but which will organize themselves soon.

35. These social changes have caused an important evolution in ideas and morals. First, we notice in these uprooted populations a trend toward individualism which diminishes their old spirit of solidarity. The restricted community of the native tribe, with its many regulations, guaranteed morality. The mixture of all tribes takes away these customs and causes a spirit of license.

36. The big employers, conscious of the problem, take jealous care of the workingmen. The drastic rules laid down by the government in protection of the working native are reinforced by the directions of the business organizations and applied in a real Christian manner. It may be said that nowhere do the missions, the State and business organizations work in a more unanimous effort to guarantee the native religious, material and political welfare. The magazine *South African Industry and Trade,* in 1943, warned South Africans to study the manner in which the Belgian Congo treats its labor. Since the Belgian Congo has never had to complain about any disorder among its working population, this gives an answer to those who fear to elevate the

workers to a really qualified labor class. Inbel Service R., No. 206, Jan. 18, 1944, pp. 9-10.)

37. The native workingmen are extensively taken care of, but the young Catholics are meeting with a critical experience in which, more than ever before, they need direction and help from the missioner.

The School Problem

38. From the beginning of mission work in the Congo, the missioners were anxious to erect schools. As soon as a new mission station was established, the missioners endeavored to organize primary education. But while thirty-five years ago the Belgian Congo possessed only primary schools, with few high or vocational schools and only one major seminary, education has now become of first importance to the apostolate in the Congo.

39. Now every apostolic vicariate takes care of the education of the natives through primary schools erected in the native villages and in the laborers' camps, and through central schools erected in every mission station, where a complete curriculum is available to boys, and girls, too, where there are Sisters.

40. This generalized school system has a first tangible result. In the Belgian Congo a large percentage of the population has received at least a primary school education. During 1947 the schools in the Congo had 1,150,000 pupils in attendance, which meant that 43 per cent of the population of school age was taken care of. It must be said that the younger generation shows a real hunger for education and that the self-educated among them are numerous.

41. In every vicariate there are normal schools where our teaching personnel are trained. Boys and girls go through a four-year study program following six years of primary school. There are, also, one or more high schools for training office-workers and employees, one or more vocational schools, and, finally, a minor seminary where classical studies are taught to candidates for the priesthood.

42. There are also some special institutions such as agricultural schools for training assistants for agricultural concerns, and medical schools for training nurses and medical assistants.

43. But until recent times, university education did not exist out-

side of the major seminaries where candidates for the priesthood, coming from many different vicariates, were brought together for a curriculum of three years of philosophical and five years of theological studies. Since then several colleges have been founded for preparing students for the university.

44. "Lovanium" is the name of the first university center for the Congolese. The Catholic University of Louvain, the oldest university in Belgium, wanted to be the first to establish a center of university studies for the Negroes in the Congo. For that reason the Belgian university gave the Congo institute the name which has become renowned throughout the world. A telegram of February 25, 1949, announced that the Belgian Government has recognized the university status of Lovanium.

45. The university center of Lovanium was established near Kisantu in the Apostolic Vicariate of Kwango, 130 kilometers south of Leopoldville, and has existed now for several years. Twenty-five years ago Dr. Malengreau, helped by a group of Louvain professors, founded a hospital in Kisantu, to which a school of medical studies was added. It is called FOMULAC (Fondation Medicale de l'Universite de Louvain au Congo). Some years later another group of professors, headed by M. Antoine, added a school for agronomic studies, CADULAC (Centre Agronomique de l'Universite de Louvain au Congo). To these two institutions a school of administrative and commercial studies was added in 1946. Soon, a school of education will be added to train teachers for high schools and colleges. Students of the combined schools live in a dormitory supervised by the Jesuit Fathers.

46. Of all African colonies, the Belgian Congo comes first in the field of education, as well as in the number of pupils attending. While 43 per cent of school-age children are going to school in the Congo, only 9 per cent enjoy primary education in Nigeria, 12 per cent in the Gold Coast, 17 per cent in Kenya, 30 per cent in Uganda, 28 per cent in Northern Rhodesia, and 5 per cent in French Equatorial Africa.

47. Up to the present time all schools were sponsored by Catholic and Protestant missioners. (It is only just to mention that schools sponsored by the Belgian missioners were subsidized by the State.)

48. Recently, the erection of public schools has been advocated for the benefit of the natives. But, to erect these schools as opposed to the education given in the Catholic and Christian schools, will be a great

mistake which will benefit no one. The result will be that students who go through these schools will abandon not only the beliefs of their ancestors, but will have a further dilemna, Christian belief or nothing.

49. How can we educate the Negro without teaching him the religious ways of life? Through education his earlier superstitious beliefs fade away. The school has to give him a substitute which is only to be found in Christian doctrine and ethics. The creation of public schools that are opposed to the existing Catholic schools will cultivate in the minds of the children misconceptions about both religion and government. Any antagonism between the State and the missions will have no other result than to diminish the confidence of the natives and shake their loyalty towards both.

The "Evolved" Negroes

50. "Evolved" Congolese are those who have received such intellectual and moral education that they have outgrown their native surroundings and community. They are in favor of the policy of assimilation and they cherish the hope of being some day received into civilized society.

51. Up to the present time in the Congo, only the native priests have been able to enter into this European civilized community. Many apostolic vicariates now have their own diocesan religious communities where the Congolese Brothers and Sisters live under the direction of foreign priests or Sisters.

52. There is a wide diversity of thought among evolved natives. The big majority are aware of the progress which colonization has brought to their country, and they are conscious of their professional duties and social obligations. They are nationalists, and that is their right. But still they are convinced that European occupation of the Congo is necessary for proper administration of the country, that it would be doomed to decay and anarchy without it. They know that civilization is a result of the Belgian colonization and they are grateful to Belgium because of this.

53. Besides the elite of evolved natives, there are others who think themselves superior to the other natives and insist on being treated as such, solely on account of a rudimentary education. They resent it if a

white man addresses them in the native tongue. They think themselves entitled to special consideration on account of their capacities, look down on the less-privileged natives and are very unkind to them.

54. The danger for this group of evolved natives is that they may believe themselves victims of racial prejudice. Actually, racial prejudice is unknown to the white man in the Belgian Congo, but it exists in the mind of the evolved who thinks, all too easily, "they treat me so on account of my color."

55. The secret aspiration of the evolved Negro is to establish his place in the European society. He may easily judge himself wronged on account of his color. It is true that white men do live apart from the Negroes in the Congo, but this happens without the least ostracism of the Negro. In Europe, also, there are different classes that do not live together. As elsewhere, white men in the Congo must always show themselves educated enough to avoid hurting the Negroes' natural feelings in matters of national pride, race and color. When most of the evolved natives have gone through university training, they will probably have acquired enough judgment to formulate a sound attitude toward problems of race and prejudice, problems which for the moment are peculiar to them alone.

56. Right now this problem exists: the evolved natives easily succumb to foreign propaganda, and may be especially susceptible to Communist ideas. Many of them know enough French to read newspapers from Belgium, and it is a fact that they read much French literature. There is a real danger in this reading for the evolved, because so few among them possess a sufficiently critical judgment to think intelligently about social and national problems.

57. This question of the evolved natives concerns the missions as well as the State, and is certainly of paramount importance for the future. It will be their privilege, and not the privilege of the chiefs—except perhaps in Ruanda-Urundi—to help govern their country. Their influence on the evolution of thought among the Congolese cannot easily be exaggerated.

58. For this reason the missioners are devoting themselves wholeheartedly to the education of the evolved's mentality, mainly through libraries, through the press, and through Catholic Action associations. This apostolate requires a great deal of zeal and patience, but its importance for the future of the Church in the Congo is very great.

6.

Financial Problem of the Missions

59. Our Lord recommended to His Apostles not to take with them any money or superfluous things when He sent them out to announce the Good Tidings to the world. It is, therefore, preferable that the missions do not possess too much. The richness of the old abbeys was one of the reasons for their downfall. If missions in the Congo ever become too wealthy, they certainly will fail in their purpose. For the moment that danger is completely non-existent. The mission Superiors are faced with financial problems which are very often nightmares to them. Many missions are actually in financial difficulty and have to work continually to keep their institutions and activities going.

60. The sources of income for a mission are these: the subsidies of the Pontifical missionary associations—the Propagation of the Faith, the Holy Childhood, and the Society of St. Peter the Apostle for Native Clergy; money granted by the State—subsidies for schools and for cultural purposes allocated to every mission station; plus the donations of the Catholics at home, given for the missions.

61. In addition there is the income from plantations organized on the land given by the State to certain missions, and the income from cattle breeding in certain other missions. These last incomes from the country itself are the main item for balancing the missions' budget.

62. To be complete, mention should be made of subsidies allocated to some missions by neighboring colonial corporations in order to establish and keep up schools and hospitals for them.

63. Facing this income is the following impressive list of expenses which no mission can escape:

64. Living expenses of missioners, and their travel expenses to and from Europe. Here the point must be stressed that the missioners stay in the Congo for unusually long terms without returning to Belgium on leave. Every colonial agent fills a term of two years in the colony after which he returns to the mother country for a physical checkup and a rest of six months. Missioners stay a first term of ten years;

their second term is usually without any terminal stipulations, and their return to the mother country is allowed only for sickness or other major reasons.

65. Mission activities: living expenses of catechists and catechumens. The schools: no State subsidy is sufficient to cover the expenses. Building expenses: churches, houses for the missioners, hospitals, dormitories, quarters for the native hired labor. A mission in the Congo represents an impressive complex of buildings and to erect this compound requires a tremendous amount of money.

66. It is true that the missions every year absorb lots of money, and the abyss of expense will remain unspanned because missions have to face the same expenses every year and they also have to expand all the time. However, the realizations brought forth by the missions in the Congo will stand for centuries as a testimonial to the spirit of faith and of the generosity of the Catholics of Europe and the Congo! Especially, the numerous magnificent church buildings. They stand witness to the skill and daring of missionary Brothers who erected them with only the help of native craftsmen.

67. Certain newspapers have had the bad taste to say that the missioners have not been disinterested in their endeavors on account of the imposing incomes of some of the missions. In reply let us point out that though the missions are always importing capital from Europe and America, they have never exported Congolese capital. Moreover, all real property of the Catholic missions in the Congo is situated on the land conceded to the missions by the government for the use of the missions, but it cannot be alienated by them. Some day all properties belonging to the missions will go to the Church of the Congo and its native clergy. They will always remain, in this way, the property of the native community.

7.

Religious Practice and Moral Situation of the Modern Catholics

68. As far as the religious practices of the Catholics are concerned, it is very difficult to give general statistics about the whole of the Congo. One can only guess at the real figures. It seems that the proportion of practicing Catholics varies from 60 per cent to 90 per cent according to the different vicariates. There is also a big difference between the mission stations in any one vicariate.

69. What is the reason for the lessening of religious fervor? The evolution of thought, which has caused a general emancipation, is one cause; but it is not the only one, nor the most important.

70. In regions where religious practice has lessened, the reason must be sought in the deterioration of morals. Return to polygamy, practice of free love, and most of all divorce, are the main reasons why a great number of Catholics keep away from the Sacraments and from religious practice.

71. There are no statistics to show the number of Christians not receiving the Sacraments because they live in adultery. In this class there are some lustful people who advocate free love; others who delay Catholic marriage for fear of binding themselves forever; others because the question of paying the dowry for the bride is still unsettled or, especially in the cities, because they cannot afford the big expenses of a wedding celebration.

72. As far as return to polygamy or divorce is concerned, the statistics for the entire Congo mention 11.5 per cent of the families, of which 5.5 per cent returned to polygamy, and the remaining 6 per cent is made up by divorce. But here again there is a great difference to be noticed depending on the different vicariates, or regions. The best among the vicariates have only 5 per cent of illegitimate mar-

riages. In vicariates where morals are at their worst, there will be up to 20 per cent and 30 per cent.

73. Finally, it must be said that there are some tribes in the Congo where moral standards have always been higher, and others where morals have always been very low. Most of the Catholics keep the good or bad morals of their original tribes. The uprooted people in general take over the morals and customs of their new surroundings. There are exceptions, to this rule, but they rather confirm it.

74. Some among the missioners contend that the first Christians had a stronger faith and showed greater zeal for things religious than their brethren of today. It is true that the first converts were possessed of a greater zeal than those who were converted in large groups. They had to overcome many more obstacles in their conversions, and this resulted in a more vigorous conviction in the Faith. It is true, also, that the earliest converts were more docile and obedient. But this was due to the fact that all converts belonged to the class of those who were living in their customary surroundings in the villages thirty years ago. Now there is the problem of a great number of uprooted people, laborers and others who have immigrated into the large population centers.

75. Right now a kind of emancipation movement is taking place among the natives, due to the evolution of thought and economic progress. The natives of the old days were more subdued in their manner, but they had the mentality of slaves. The present-day Catholics are conscious of their status as human beings and they practice their religion with greater freedom. Moreover, if some among them were converted in groups, under the influence of a collective conscience natural to the natives; or if some too-material motives were present to facilitate their conversion, now it is a known fact to pagans and Christians alike that conversion to Catholicism is a personal affair concerning eternal well-being. Conversion becomes more and more an individual, considered action. Their faith being purified of too-material views, perseverance in it becomes more free and personal.

76. There are magnificent manifestations of faith on the part of converts. It is enough to witness the meetings of the Catholics on the main holy days of the year, on Christmas, Easter, or the Assumption, to realize there is faith in them. On these days the missioner has to hear as many as two, three and even four thousand confessions.

77. Cases of apostasy from the Faith are rather unusual. Most of the Catholics who cannot receive the Sacraments on account of illegitimate marriage will do their utmost to reconcile themselves with God as soon as there is danger of death, and often they die in friendship with Almighty God. There is also an elite of Catholics very active in Catholic Action work, who would not hesitate to give their lives for the Faith. Finally, there are already a great many native priests, Brothers and Sisters, who bear witness to the vitality of our Congolese Catholics.

78. If the religious zeal of old has slackened in some regions, the Faith has remained as vivid as before. The moral situation and the religious situation can be described as follows: on the credit side there is a more personal, individualistic and free acceptance of the Faith; on the debit side, a decline of religious fervor, mainly to be ascribed to greater license of morals.

8.

Catholic Missions vs. Protestant Missions

79. One does not question the zeal of the Protestant missionaries. A man like Livingstone is a model of religious conviction, of charity and self-sacrifice. But still it remains true that the fact of heresy and schism in Christianity is a great misfortune for the mission countries. Formerly, Protestant missions were almost exclusively represented in the Congo by British missionaries. Since the first World War, however, American and Swedish missionaries have arrived in great numbers.

80. It is difficult to form a just idea of Protestant activity in the Congo. At present, the Protestant missionaries number about 1,000 and live dispersed over the whole territory of the Colony, although there are still regions where they have not penetrated. Many times one will find a Protestant catechist and a Catholic catechist active in the same native village at the same time. Protestant adherents are estimated, approximately, at 1,000,000. But in most Protestant missions the number of baptized is rather small. Baptism by immersion is conferred only after a very lengthy probation, yet, at the same time, all sympathizers are counted among the adherents.

81. There was a time when Protestant missionaries were much more combative and aggressive toward the Catholic missioners. But, notwithstanding the fact that they seem to have dropped their virulent antagonism, their educational work spreads among the natives a religious indifferentism. Some go so far as to preach to the natives to pray with them or with the Catholic Fathers, whichever they like. "We are all Christians, and one faith is as good as another!"

82. Apart from these Christian missions there is the Salvation Army, which, until now, has been active only in the big city centers where it has made a large number of converts. This organization appeals mostly to the simple people and remains a danger for Catholics.

83. As far as morals are concerned, Protestant missions insist mainly

on charity, and the duties of charity surely must be taught in a country like the Congo where charity toward one's neighbor was something unknown—as in every other truly pagan land. But Protestants compromise on the severity of Christian morals insofar as the indissolubility of marriage is concerned.

84. Furthermore, by propagating the doctrine of free thinking and the denial of authority of the spiritual head of the Church, the Protestants undermine the principle of authority among the natives. Many nationalistic disturbances have had their origin in the doctrine of free thinking. For example, some Protestant subjects declared themselves inspired, and preached nationalistic and anti-governmental doctrines. Such a man was Kibangu, who gave his name to the sect, Kibangism.

9.

The Catholic Missioner in the Congo

85. The first missioners to the Congo had to build up their own mission stations, just as the monks had to do in the early evangelization eras in Europe. Now, although many mission stations still have to be founded and organized, the normal activity of a missioner does not consist of erecting new stations. Formerly the missioners had to travel in heathen countries in order to get in contact with these people and prepare in this way the propagation of the Gospel. This preparatory stage actually belongs to the past.

86. Missioners still have to travel a lot in order to visit their converts dispersed in the native villages and in the working camps. But these apostolic journeys, which have a poetical value only in the eyes of young missioners not yet acquainted with the real facts of mission life, are a duty required by the missioner's position as pastor of souls. To teach catechism three times a day, give the Catholics the opportunity of receiving the Sacraments, baptize the children of Catholics and children of pagans in danger of death, make sick calls, seek those who have fallen away, handle cases of polygamy and divorce, bring harmony into broken homes, bring peace where hostility prevails—these are the things the missioners have to do during their apostolic journeys. Now that in many regions the Catholic population represents a third or even a half of the total population, an apostolate among the natives becomes a very different thing from what it was forty or fifty years ago when the missioners first had to make converts. Actually, even the pagan population knows fairly well the main obligations one assumes when he becomes a Catholic.

87. In addition to these ordinary occupations of every missioner, there are some special activities: direction of the Sisters, preaching retreats to Christians and catechumens, directing associations for Catholic Action and other associations whose aim is the building-up of the Christian mentality—such as the Congregation of the Blessed Virgin and sodalities for the restoration of Catholic families.

88. Besides this the missioner has to listen patiently to the complaints and differences submitted by the natives for his arbitration. He must make available his precious time for the endless palavers of every day which require a great amount of patience, but which cannot be dismissed if the missioner wants to keep his authority unquestioned. The same can be said of diligently looking-up those who have fallen away. When one neglects to go after those who have returned to polygamy, or who have been divorced or separated, people drift away in no time. Even the pagans would soon think it was not necessary to think about conversion, since the missioner himself would not seem very interested in whether his Christians fell away or not.

89. This is the realistic picture of the daily life of a missioner in the Congo, quite like the ordinary life of a priest in Europe or America. There is only one difference. In Europe and America, even in the most un-Christian areas, there is a Christian mentality in the people; a sequence of Christian tradition. In the Congo, even where a majority of converts is found, a pagan mentality still prevails. Conversion of peoples takes much more time than economic evolution, because it is bound to reach much deeper. The conversion of Europe took many centuries and it took plenty of time before they became the people endowed with a great faith who built the magnificent cathedrals of the Middle Ages. The Church in the Congo will only be definitely founded when the missioners have been replaced by a native clergy.

10.

Conclusion

90. Half a century ago the Belgian missioners faced the problem of converting the wild Congo population. Hard work, many sacrifices and a strong faith proved worth while because one-third of the population became Catholics.

91. The first method of working consisted in the spreading of religion and civilization, in contacting as many people as possible and trying to draw them into the Church. The mission succeeded, principally, through the schools. These same schools have provided the boys for the seminaries from which the bishops have selected and ordained 243 native priests.

92. Today this problem arises, a logical sequel to years of hard work: thousands of young people look to the Church for more education. They want a better opportunity in life.

93. The Church must give them that opportunity by providing them with high schools, colleges and universities. This program works toward a day when educated men and women of the Congo will be able to take care of the educational needs of their own society.

94. Social welfare, higher education, Catholic family life and full religious care of the new growing cities, are the principal items to be considered in an up-to-date program in the Congo.

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Study Outline

GERALD C. TREACY, S.J.

Belgian Congo is a land of contrasts: contrasts in topography and climate as well as among the different tribes. The Gospel only reached Central Africa in the 19th century. The Holy Ghost Fathers were the first to start mission work along the African coast. King Leopold II in 1888 asked the Immaculate Heart Mission Society for missioners. From that time to the present it may be said that all Catholic Belgium has made a united mission effort in the Congo.

We must admit that the conquest of the Congo by Belgium made possible the preaching of the Gospel to the pagan tribes. We must also admit that conversion is very difficult for the native, plunged as he is in superstition, and terrified by the witch doctors. The greatest force in conversion is the self-sacrificing example of the missioners. Human motives of course enter into the picture. But the supernatural contains the full answer to conversion.

The method of the mission apostolate in the Congo resembles the method of the missioners and monks who civilized Europe. The Congo missioners must build up mission stations. These stations organize schools. The mission schools train the catechist. And no one is more important in the plan of the mission apostolate than the catechist.

A new problem faces the Congo missioner. It is a real rush toward the big population centers. For example in 1935 only 5% of the natives lived outside their tribal villages. In 1944 this number increased to 14%. The missioner must adapt himself to the changing social conditions of his people. While formerly he dealt with a relatively stable population in the native villages, now the missioner must work among a constantly changing population.

Of all African colonies Belgian Congo comes first in the field of education. Up to the present all schools have been sponsored by Catholic and Protestant missioners, and subsidized by the State. Recently neutral schools have been advocated. The introduction of these schools would be fatal to the best interests of Belgian Congo.

QUESTIONS

Why is Belgian Congo called a land of contrasts?
When was the first attempt made to bring the Faith to Central Africa?
How does King Leopold II figure in the Congo mission field?
How did Catholic Belgium respond to the mission needs of the Congo?

What did the conquest of the Congo by Belgium do for mission activity?
Why was conversion extremely difficult for the first generation of Natives?
Describe the religious beliefs of the Native.
How do the Natives regard the witch doctor?
To what influence did Father Cambier ascribe the conversion of the first Natives?
Enumerate some of the human motives influencing conversion.
How do the Congo missioners resemble the early missioners who civilized Europe?
What part does the catechist play in the mission field?
Explain the co-operation of the catechist with the missioner.
What has caused a change in mission methods in the Congo?
The Congo proletariat is a free proletariat. Explain.
Social changes in the Congo have affected morals. Explain.
How is the worker treated in the Congo by the employer?
What part does education play in the Congo mission?
How do the Congo Natives regard education?
How does Belgian Congo compare with other African colonies in educational progress?
What does the State do for mission schools?
Would neutral schools benefit the Natives?
Who are the evolved Congolese?
What is the danger for the evolved Congolese?
What means are used by the missioners in educating the evolved Congolese?
What are the sources of income for a mission?
Enumerate some of the expenses of any mission.
How do the present converts compare with the first converts in the Congo?
How may the religious situation in the Congo be described?
Describe Protestant missionary activity in the Congo.
What does Protestantism stress in its teaching?
What is the normal activity of the modern missioner in the Congo?
What is the difference between the missioner's life and the priest's life in Europe or America?
When will the Church in the Congo be definitely founded?
What two great virtues must the missioner possess?
Explain the reason for the Apostles' success.
How does Fr. Matteo define a missioner?
How are we to obtain the conversion of the world?

A Note on the Author

The Reverend Albert Nobels, I.H.M., was born March 9, 1904, in Malines, Belgium. Educated at St. Rombaut School, Malines, and at St. Mary's School, Norwood, England, he entered the Immaculate Heart of Mary Mission Society in 1922, and was ordained in 1929. He went to Kasai, in the Congo, in 1930, where he served as director of the mission school in Katende from 1930 to 1933. He directed the mission schools in Mai Munene from 1933 to 1943, and was Superior of the mission of Mai Munene from 1943 to 1946.

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The authors of the various studies of the Missionary Academia express their own views, which are necessarily independent of the National Council of The Society for the Propagation of the Faith.

The study outline and questions for "Catholic Missions in the Belgian Congo," were formulated by Gerald C. Treacy, S.J., who has prepared study club editions of various encyclicals.

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